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# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

FEBRUARY 1969

VOLUME IV

NO. 2

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Joan Walker.

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## ACTIVITIES FOR FEBRUARY

..... Inside Back Cover.

Published by the

## **THAMES SCIENCE CENTER**

622 Williams Street  
New London, Connecticut 06320

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**JOHN F. GARDNER--Executive Director**  
**ROBERT C. DEWIRE--Naturalist**  
**MICHAEL WALKER--Curator**

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The Thames Science Center is a nonprofit organization seeking a quality environment through education.

The active support of children and adults in the Science Center, its programs, activities and efforts is earnestly solicited.

John F. Gardner  
Editor

— YOUR MEMBERSHIP HELPS SUPPORT AND MAINTAIN —

The Interpretive Museum of 622 Williams Street, New London, Connecticut 06320  
The Peace Sanctuary Nature Preserve At 200 River Road, Mystic, Connecticut 06355



FEBRUARY is the month of nests. Hidden by leaves all summer long, the nests of various birds and other animals suddenly become noticeable in the bare woods. How often have you walked past a certain bush along a trail in the summer, never noticing anything unusual and then in the winter seeing a nest in the bush only an arm's length away. You and probably dozens of other people walked within a few feet of the nest full of eggs, babies, or perhaps even the mother sitting quietly on her nest. Yet no one saw it!



**BALTIMORE ORIOLE NEST**

Some nests to look for are the hanging bag-like nest of the Baltimore Oriole usually high in a tree out toward the end of a branch. Brier thickets are good places for Catbirds to nest. They put a lot of large pieces of grass in their nest. Vireos build their nest where a branch forks out into two. The rim of the nest

Photo by Dewire

is attached to the two branches at the fork and the bowl part hangs below. In marshes, the nest of the Long-billed Marsh Wren is attached to several close growing cattails. It is about halfway up the cattails and is round with the entrance hole in the middle.

Other animal nests become visible now and include the large Gray Squirrel nests filled with leaves. The large, gray paper nests of the Bald-faced Hornets look like gray basketballs hanging from tree branches. As the cattails and other tall marsh plants die down in winter the mounds that are the homes of the Muskrats become visible.



~~BALD-FACED HORNET'S NEST~~

Photo by R. Dewire

See how many nests you can find in one trip through a wooded area.



# FEBRUARY'S CALENDAR

February is the month of snowy but lengthening days.

February 2... Ground Hog Day -- Let's hope friend woodchuck sees no shadow.

February 2... The full Snow Moon.

February 4... Dandelions come into flower.

February 7... Snow Buntings move in small numbers along our beaches.

February 11... Apples, hawthorns and berries of multiflora rose hold small flocks of wintering robins.

February 12... Woodcock begin to migrate northward.

February 18... Brant arrive along the coast and stop to rest before continuing further North.

February 20... Ring-necked ducks can be found in ponds and coves where there is open water.

February 23... Great Horned Owls begin to nest-- using old osprey or crow nests.

February 26... Large flocks of Canvasbacks and Scaup ducks in our rivers often have a rare Redhead duck among them.

February 28... Green shoots of skunk cabbage become noticeable in swampy areas.



*Annual Dinner Meeting  
February 12th, 1969*

# TALES FROM PEQUOT HILL

by TRUDY GARDNER

Furry is a little white-footed mouse who makes his home at Pequot Hill. He lives in an old woodpecker hole and I see him almost every day early in the morning taking seed from the bird feeding station near our kitchen window.



Usually you would not see Furry or any of his family in the day time as they are most active at night.

White-footed mice are good climbers but spend most of their time on the ground looking for seeds and nuts which they store in their nests.

Photo by Joan Walker



They use the same nests in summer and winter with one pair to a nest.

Furry is a cute little mammal with big black eyes and over-sized ears. He is all white underneath and brown on top. His tail is short and of course he has white feet.

White-footed mice are likable fellows, and not at all like their cousins the house mice that like to live between our walls and in our cupboards.

When the snow falls on the ground look and see if you can find the tiny tracks of this interesting mouse around your yard.



Photo by Joan Walker

# ROCK HOUNDS

by JERRY THEILER

Fossils are evidence of past life. They are almost always found in sedimentary rock. Scientists divide them into 4 main classes:

- 1) Original Remains - these are animal or plant parts that have not changed since the animal or plant died. Example - mammoths frozen in ice.
- 2) Replaced Remains - are parts of living things that have been replaced by a mineral. Often the exact cell structure still appears in these fossils. Example - petrified wood.
- 3) Molds - are formed when a fossil dissolves in rock leaving a hold in the shape of itself; Casts are formed from minerals filling in this hole. Example - clam or scallop fossils.
- 4) Impressions - are imprints as evidence of life. Example - dinosaur footprints or leaf imprints.



Photo by Joan Walker



# ALONG THE SHORE

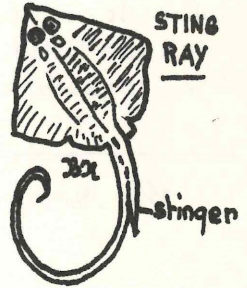
by BARBARA KASHANSKI



## THE SKATE

During the months of snow and ice when the word "skate" is mentioned we think of gliding over smooth, clear ice - playing hockey, tag, or crack the whip. When one is talking about the seashore, though, a "skate" is very different from what we used to play on the ice.

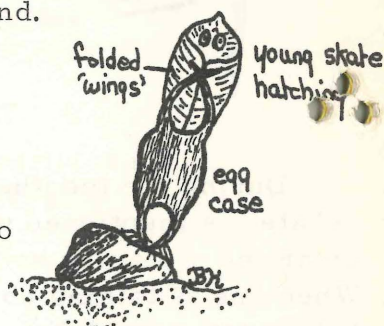
The skate that lives in salt water along our Atlantic coast is a fish that grows about 2 feet long - a very unusual looking fish. It looks something like a kite; it swims by flapping its wide winglike fins; and it steers with its long tail that has two small fins, like rudders, near the end. Skates look a lot like the poisonous sting rays, but do not have the poisonous stinger on their tails and so are harmless.



The adult skate is speckled brown on its back so that it looks like the sea bottom from above. The underneath parts are whitish though, so if any of its enemies were below him the skate would blend in with the light color of the sky above and would be very hard to see.

Unless many of our readers are salt water fishermen and have caught skates by mistake, most of you have probably never seen the skate fish. What is often seen along our shores is the egg case of the skate. This case is blackish, hard, and has two hornlike prongs at each end. The egg cases are sometimes called "sea purses" or "Devil's pocketbooks." Each case usually only holds one egg and is attached to a rock or something beneath the water. The attachment is made by threads that are fastened to the prongs at one end.

If you are wondering how a kite-shaped fish fits into a squarish shaped egg case, the answer is the winglike fins are folded over the body and only after the little skate hatches do the "wings" unfold.



If you have a skate egg case among your seashore treasures, look at it carefully and you will see the open end out of which the little fish hatches, and if you are lucky some of the threads will still be on the other end.

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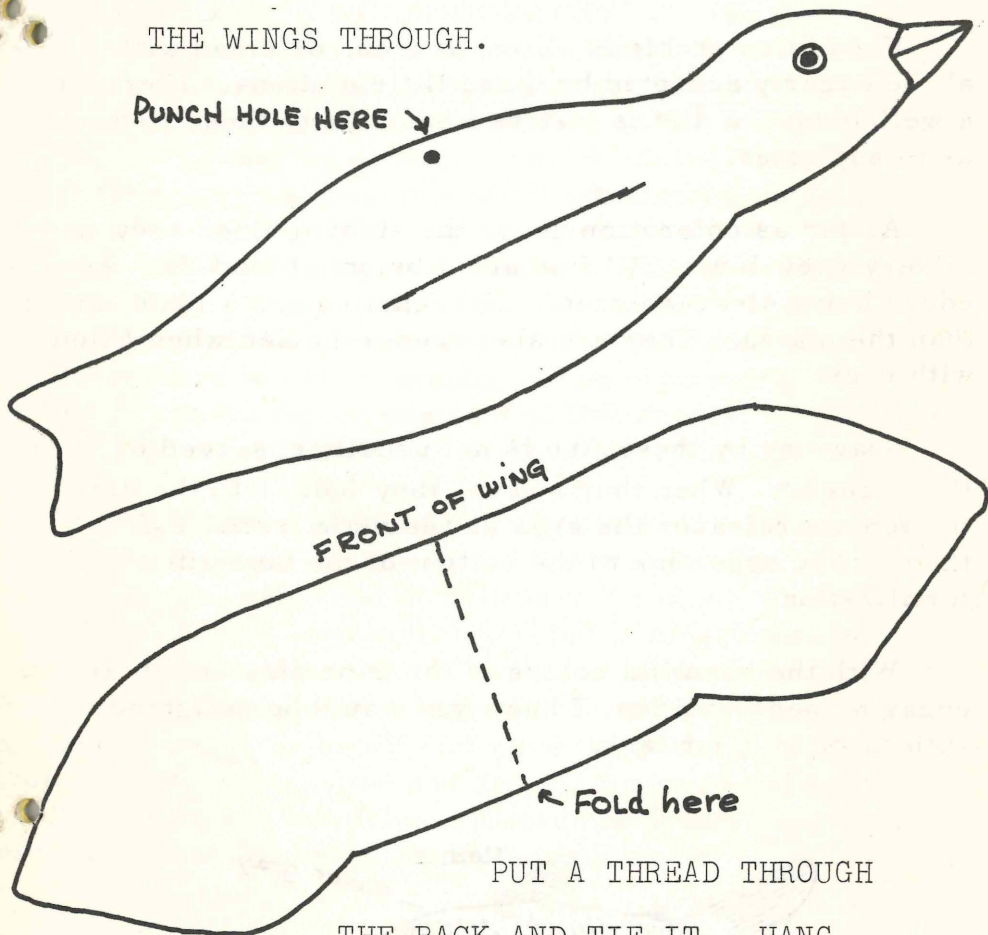
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# MAKE A FLYING BIRD

TRACE THE PATTERN ON A PIECE OF HEAVY PAPER. COLOR YOUR BIRD WITH BRIGHT COLORS, ON BOTH SIDES. CUT OUT YOUR BIRD. CUT THE SLIT IN THE BODY. PULL THE WINGS THROUGH.



PUT A THREAD THROUGH THE BACK AND TIE IT. HANG YOUR BIRD IN THE WIND. DOES IT FLY?

# PET CORNER

by DAVE RICHARDS

## BLOODFIN TETRAS

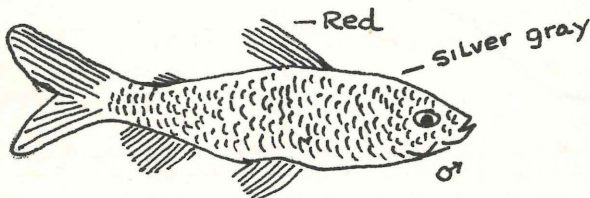
If there were policemen in the fish world, this little fellow would constantly be getting a ticket for speeding. These fast-moving, pretty little fish are an excellent choice for the beginner. They have been known to survive 50 temperatures, although 76 - 78 is much more suitable.

Food is no problem. Live, frozen, or dried will all be eagerly accepted by these little gluttons. However, a well-balanced diet is just as important to these fish as to any other.

As far as coloration goes, the stream-lined body is silvery grey-blue. All fins are a bright, blood-red the edges being clear-colored. The females are a little larger than the males. They are also deeper-bodied when filled with eggs.

Spawning by these fish is not usually observed by the hobbyist. When they spawn, they jump into the air; the female releases the eggs as the male fertilizes them. The eggs sink to the bottom of the tank after fertilization.

With the beautiful colors of the Bloodfin, and their engaging personalities, I know you would be delighted with them in your tank.







## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK . . . .

We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook. . . . Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible. . . .

INTERESTED IN OCEANOGRAPHY??? The United States Government Printing Office in Washington has printed a new book called Questions About Oceans. It is a book of 100 questions and answers on the oceans including the subjects of marine geology, marine biology and marine meteorology. The questions were selected as those most often asked oceanographers by the average person. Why is the ocean blue? What makes it salty? What do oysters and clams eat? Where do waves come from? These are examples of the questions asked. This excellent initial exposure to oceanography can be obtained by sending 55¢ to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 20402.

STATE-WIDE CARDINAL-TITMOUSE CENSUS... The annual New England census of cardinals and tufted titmice will be held the week-end of February 8 and 9. The census in Connecticut will attempt to establish a measurement of the base population from which these birds appear to be spreading through New England. To participate--which consists of noting on an official card the presence of these birds at your feeder--call and ask for a survey card. These are available from the Science Center in cooperation with the Connecticut Conservation Association.

WETLANDS PURCHASE... The World Wildlife Fund in Washington announced the recent purchase of 950 acres of wetlands along the southern New Jersey coastline. Total cost of the purchase was \$100,000 and was considered a step of critical importance to the fishing industry on the Atlantic seaboard.

CONSERVATION DIRECTORY AVAILABLE... The National Wildlife Federation has published a "Conservation Directory" which lists Federal and State agencies, citizens groups on a national and state level and regional and international organizations concerned with natural resources. There are other sections that name Congressional committees related in conservation interests, list the fish and game commissioners in the U. S. and Canada, and present a guide to the major colleges and universities offering professional training in conservation careers. This useful reference volume can be ordered for \$1.50, prepaid, from the National Wildlife Federation, 1412 16th Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20036.

CHRISTMAS COUNTS... Final results of the Christmas Bird Censuses throughout the state gave top honors to Lyme-Saybrook with 112 species. Second was New Haven with 107 species while third and fourth were New London and Westpoint with 106 and 97 species respectively.

MR. WALKER NAMED EDITOR... Science Center Curator Mike Walker has been named Editor of the Bulletin of the newly formed Connecticut Herpetological Society. Mr. Walker noted that over fifty persons have planned to join the group and interest and enthusiasm is very high.



# CONNECTICUT CREATURES

by MIKE WALKER

When you are rattlesnake collecting on a rocky, wooded hillside where the snakes are known to abound, you operate under a certain amount of tension because you can never be sure just when or where one of the creatures will appear. You are very susceptible to being startled by sudden noises or movements. During a rattlesnake hunt in the Berkshires last fall I was repeatedly victimized by small mammals which I could swear took perverse pleasure in scaring me time after time as they rushed through the dry leaves or flashed over the edge of a rock.

My mischievous tormentors were eastern chipmunks, small rodents whose striped bodies and saucy cries of "chip - chip - chip - chip" are familiar to anyone who has ventured into Connecticut's woods and fields. They rank as one of our most abundant and visible mammals.

In Connecticut they are the smallest member of the squirrel family. Adults are usually less than 6 inches in body length. Their tail adds another three to four inches to their overall size.

Chipmunks favor open woodlands with an abundance of old logs, brushy tangles and rockpiles. In a hidden spot they dig a borrow that may extend for more than thirty feet underground. There is never a tell-tale mound of dirt at the entrance - evidently the canny rodents scatter the dirt from their excavations to help conceal the exact location of their homes. They have good reason to operate with such caution because they are on the menus of a wide range of forest animals including foxes, hawks, owls, large snakes, raccoons and bobcats. The most feared enemy of the chipmunk however, is the short-tailed weasel. The weasel's slender body enables him to pursue the chipmunk

through his own tunnels. In the winter, sleeping chipmunks usually block the entrance to their burrow with a plug of dirt in an attempt to thwart the little predator.

Chipmunks are not true hibernators and although they are usually gone from the woods after the first few hard frosts, a warm spell in January or February will bring them above ground for a few days.

In April the recently emergent males seek a mate. Three to five hairless, blind young are born in a nesting chamber lined with rootlets and grass. The babies develop rapidly and leave the nest a month after they are born.

Adult chipmunks feed on nuts, fruits, berries and the tender shoots of young plants as many a disgruntled gardener can attest. On some occasions though, the rodents turn carnivore and they may eat worms, insects, young birds and small snakes.

In the fall chipmunks rush through the woods gathering food to hoard against winter weather. Their underground chambers may contain over a bushel of nuts before they retire for the season.

Chipmunks are missed during the winter because a wood's walk is somehow brighter for the presence of these alert pranksters in pinstripe.

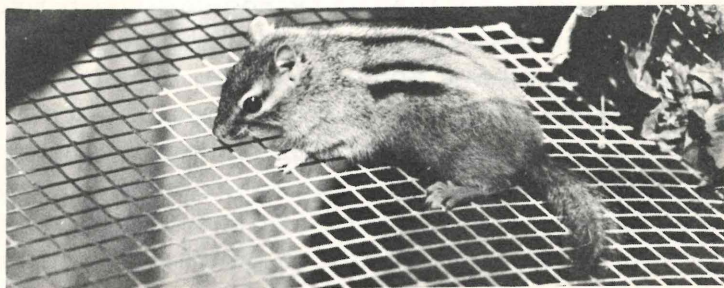


Photo by Joan Walker



# YOUR OWN NATURE JAUNT *by BOB DEWIRE*

## TO A PINE GROVE

A pine grove is a very interesting area to visit in the dead of winter. Pines provide shelter to various animals from cold winds and snowy days. They also serve as a food source both in the cones they have and the insect eggs and larvae that may be on or in the branches of the trees.

Many mammals are present in a pine grove, but one usually sees signs of their presence rather than the animal itself. Small runways and tunnels criss-cross the blanket of pine needles. If you are very quiet and do not move, you may occasionally see one of the animals who builds this network. The white-footed mouse is the most common of those animals but another little rodent may also be present -- the boreal or red-backed vole. It looks something like a mouse but lacks the large external ears and has a shorter tail. As its name implies, the back is quite reddish brown. Another resident mammal that may scold and chatter at you as you enter the grove is the red squirrel. The smallest of our tree dwelling squirrels, his red color is brightest during the winter. Look for the ear tufts that also form at this time.

Several songbirds may also be found in the pine grove. The little golden-crowned kinglet is one bird in particular that rarely goes far from the pines. An insect-eater, it is able to find enough eggs and larvae of insects to maintain itself throughout the winter. Other songbirds that are regularly found in pines include the

black-capped chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch and brown creeper. If there is a good cone crop on the trees they will be especially attractive to several of the northern finches including the pine siskin and the two species of cross-bills -- red and white-winged -- whose bills are specifically adapted to taking the seeds out of the cones.

Lastly, pine groves are the roosting sites of many birds. Crows and mourning doves may use them at night and black-crowned night herons often are present in the day time, especially if the grove is near water. The most regular roosting bird in a pine grove in winter is the owl. The darkness of the grove by day combined with protection from the wind and an ample food supply, are reasons for the owl's presence. In the winter two of the most common owls to look for are the long-eared - a medium sized owl with very long ear tufts and the saw-whet - our smallest owl only the size of a starling - with no ear tufts. Both will usually allow you to stand right under the tree they are in while they look down at you. The owl's grayish pellets of fur and bones found on the ground around a tree are a sure sign that an owl is wintering in the grove.

If you have access to a pine grove, visiting it regularly in the winter and keeping a list of the wildlife present will show you what an active place a pine grove can be - even in the dead of winter.



Photo by B. Dewire



# CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

## 1968

New London and Lyme-Saybrook held their annual Christmas counts again this year. The 15-mile diameter circle for New London stretches from Mason's Island west to Rocky Neck State Park while in Lyme-Saybrook circle goes from Hawk's Nest Beach in Old Lyme to Hammonasset State Beach in Madison.

New London held its census on Friday December 27th on a cloudy and windless day. Twenty-four people in 8 parties covered their areas and along with twenty-five feeders reporting, gave them a total of 106 species.

The Lyme-Saybrook census was held on Monday, December 30th on a sunny but windy day. Some seventy people in 10 parties thoroughly covered the area and ended the day with 113 species.

Below is an entire list of all the species seen on the two counts. The numbers indicate how many were seen on each census. Both counts were highly successful and it is hoped they will be again next year.

SPECIES	NEW LONDON	LYME- SAYBROOK
Common Loon	23	-
Red-throated Loon	-	13
Horned Grebe	176	9
Pied-billed Grebe	3	-
Great Cormorant	80	-
Double-crested Cormorant	28	-
Great Blue Heron	22	1
Black-crowned Night Heron	2	1
American Bittern	-	1
Mute Swan	249	40
Canada Goose	466	20
Brant	8	-
Snow Goose	4	-
Mallard	1,180	418

## SPECIES

NEW  
LONDONLYME-  
SAYBROOK

Black Duck	1, 707	1, 233
Gadwall	5	4
Pintail	13	17
Green-winged Teal	-	1
Baldpate (Am. Widgeon)	260	41
Wood Duck	-	2
Ring-necked Duck	3	1
Canvasback	444	-
Greater Scaup	675	1, 374
Common Goldeneye	379	269
Bufflehead	680	308
Oldsquaw	13	8
White-winged Scoter	21	245
Surf Scoter	54	99
Common Scoter	33	11
Ruddy Duck	-	11
Hooded Merganser	43	2
Common Merganser	6	364
Red-breasted Merganser	534	38
Goshawk	-	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	-	1
Cooper's Hawk	1	-
Red-tailed Hawk	4	17
Red-shouldered Hawk	2	3
Rough-legged Hawk	-	5
Golden Eagle	-	1
Bald Eagle	-	3
Marsh Hawk	1	15
Pigeon Hawk	1	-
Sparrow Hawk	8	22
Ruffed Grouse	2	11
Bobwhite	1	36
Ring-necked Pheasant	12	2
King Rail	-	1
Clapper Rail	1	-
Virginia Rail	-	13
Sora	-	3
Coot	22	4
Killdeer	3	2
Black-bellied Plover	1	-
Ruddy Turnstone	1	20

## SPECIES

NEW  
LONDONLYME-  
SAYBROOK

American Woodcock	1	1
Common Snipe	1	4
Greater Yellowlegs	1	-
Purple Sandpiper	32	-
Dunlin	2	-
Sanderling	2	-
Glaucous Gull	1	-
Great Black-backed Gull	146	129
Herring Gull	4, 256	5, 204
Ring-billed Gull	171	490
Bonaparte's Gull	8	12
Mourning Dove	190	264
Screech Owl	-	2
Great Horned Owl	-	2
Barred Owl	1	-
Long-eared Owl	-	1
Short-eared Owl	1	2
Belted Kingfisher	16	9
Yellow-shafted Flicker	18	10
Pileated Woodpecker	-	1
Red-bellied Woodpecker	-	1
Red-headed Woodpecker	1	-
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	-
Hairy Woodpecker	26	34
Downy Woodpecker	85	91
Horned Lark	20	109
Blue Jay	500	594
Common Crow	152	197
Fish Crow	3	-
Black-capped Chickadee	413	704
Tufted Titmouse	60	132
White-breasted Nuthatch	82	104
Red-breasted Nuthatch	15	1
Brown Creeper	5	6
Winter Wren	1	2
Carolina Wren	2	3
Long-billed Marsh Wren	-	4
Mockingbird	9	15
Catbird	3	2
Brown Thrasher	20	3



SPECIES	NEW LONDON	LYME- SAYBROOK
Robin	66	91
Hermit Thrush	-	2
Bluebird	-	45
Golden-crowned Kinglet	8	20
Water Pipit	2	1
Starling	1, 879	5, 833
Myrtle Warbler	6	19
Palm Warbler	1	1
Yellowthroat	-	1
House Sparrow	637	510
Eastern Meadowlark	34	39
Red-winged Blackbird	33	630
Baltimore Oriole	1	-
Rusty Blackbird	-	77
Common Grackle	52	794
Cowbird	1, 451	479
Cardinal	123	113
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	1	1
Evening Grosbeak	40	68
Purple Finch	49	54
House Finch	118	87
Pine Grosbeak	-	16
Common Redpoll	105	221
Pine Siskin	10	65
American Goldfinch	234	135
Towhee	30	13
Savannah Sparrow	5	32
Sharp-tailed Sparrow	-	1
Vesper Sparrow	2	2
Slate-colored-Junco	525	574
Tree Sparrow	274	833
Field Sparrow	30	139
White-throated Sparrow	240	223
Fox Sparrow	66	25
Swamp Sparrow	-	54
Song Sparrow	242	208
Lapland Longspur	-	34
Snow Bunting	2	35
<hr/>		
TOTAL SPECIES	106	112
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	19, 682	24, 292

# ACTIVITIES FOR FEBRUARY

- Feb. 8... 8:30 A.M. A field trip along the Lyme-Saybrook shoreline. Meet at the Terra Mar Inn parking lot in Saybrook.
- Feb. 9... 3:00 P.M. FAMILY FILM FESTIVAL held in auditorium of Lyman Allyn Museum. Films will be "Wildlife Rendezvous" and Walt Disney's "Bear Country." Members are admitted free. There is a 50¢ donation asked of non-members.
- Feb. 15.. 8:30 A.M. A field trip along the shore from Eastern Point in Groton to Groton Long Point. Interested persons may meet at the parking lot of Eastern Point.
- Feb. 22.. All Day. An adult field trip to Cape Ann, Mass. Phone the Center for details.
- Feb. 25.. 2:30 P.M. A special showing of the Walt Disney feature film "Jungle Cat" at the Lyman Allyn Museum auditorium. Fee 50¢
- Feb. 26.. 10:30 A.M. A demonstration program for Grades 2, 3 and 4 -- "Bird Banding". Limit 15 children. Advance registration required. No fee.
- Feb. 28.. 10:00 A.M. Junior Workshop for Grades 4, 5 and 6. "Making a Sundial." Limit 10 children. Registration required. No fee.

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OILED WATER FOWL LOSE BATTLE  
SURVIVAL ALONG OUR SHORES. . .

Photo by R. Dewire